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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KWBG IS KPAL KPAO

SUBJECT: PALESTINIANS DISMAYED BY NETANYAHU'S SPEECH

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Palestinian reaction to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's June 14 speech has been overwhelmingly negative. Palestinians believe Netanyahu introduced a series of unacceptable preconditions, as well as limitations on the future Palestinian state that render the call for such a state "meaningless." Palestinians note that Netanyahu did not agree to a settlement freeze and left the door open for the expansion of settlements under "natural growth." PA officials also criticized Netanyahu's call for Jerusalem to be "the united capital of Israel" and his rejection of any Israeli responsibility for resolving the refugee issue. PA officials expressed concern that the USG has welcomed a statement that they consider detrimental to the goals outlined by President Obama in Cairo earlier this month. End Summary.

Anger at "Preconditions"

¶2. (SBU) Senior Palestinian officials roundly criticized Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's June 14 address at Bar Ilan University, calling it a serious setback to prospects for meaningful negotiations. PLO Chief Negotiator Sa'eb Erekat issued a written statement saying, "Netanyahu spoke about negotiations, but left us with nothing to negotiate as he systematically took nearly every permanent status issue off the table." Netanyahu's call for "binding" Palestinian acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state as well as guarantees of security assurances for Israel "set further preconditions for negotiations," said Erekat, and "announced Israel's intention to unilaterally dictate a solution rather than negotiate a peace."

¶3. (C) PLO Secretary-General Yasser Abed Rabbo said that Netanyahu's references to a "demilitarized Palestinian state" in his speech "stripped it of all semblances of statehood." "So he granted us the title," Abed Rabbo said, "but wants to empty this title of content and prevent its implementation on the ground." Abed Rabbo echoed these comments in a conversation with the Consul General from Luxembourg, where he has been dispatched by Abu Mazen to consult with EU Foreign Ministers. Palestinian Presidential spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudaynah, claimed Netanyahu's comments "have done away with all initiatives and expectations" and represented "a clear challenge to the Palestinian, Arab, and U.S. positions."

¶4. (SBU) Palestinian officials said that Netanyahu should be compelled to express support for a two-state solution as outlined in the Roadmap. They also emphasized that the "preconditions" that Netanyahu spelled out on Sunday night, including references to "Israel as a Jewish State" and the security guarantees related to the future state, are not part of the Roadmap.

What Was Not Said:

Settlements, the Roadmap, and the Arab Peace Initiative

15. (SBU) PA officials noted that Netanyahu did not agree to a settlement freeze, and claimed that his reference to settlements left the door open for a policy of continued settlement expansion. Abed Rabbo said that Netanyahu's "talk of settlement activity remained ambiguous and general and kept a path open for settlement expansion under the guise of natural growth." Erekat assessed the speech as having fallen "far short of every single one of the benchmarks required of Israel in line with international law and existing agreements, including the Roadmap." Palestinian reaction also focused on the lack of any reference to the Arab Peace Initiative, which, according to Erekat, renders Netanyahu's call to meet with Arab leaders "vacuous."

What Was Said:
Jerusalem, Refugees

16. (SBU) Palestinian contacts rejected Netanyahu's positions on key permanent status issues. They reacted particularly negatively to Netanyahu's reference to Jerusalem "as the united capital of Israel" and his call for the issue of Palestinian refugees to "be resolved outside the borders of the State of Israel." Abed Rabbo criticized Netanyahu for wanting "to impose a solution that drops Palestinian refugees' right of return((and) refuses to consider Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine." Abu Rudaynah warned that Netanyahu's positions on Jerusalem and refugees "will not lead to a just and comprehensive peace."

JERUSALEM 00001005 002 OF 002

17. (C) Some of the anger evident in Palestinian reaction stems from Netanyahu's effort to, in their eyes, recast the conflict. Contacts pointed to the speech's reference to "a large number of Palestinians (living) in parts of our homeland, in the very heart of the Jewish homeland" turns the issue on its head. Erekat said: "He blamed Palestinians for their own occupation," and he "demonstrated that he lacks even the most basic understanding of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

Palestinians Looking to Obama

18. (C) Palestinian contacts said that Netanyahu's speech puts Palestinians who favor a negotiated settlement with Israel in a difficult position. PA Prime Minister Fayyad told the Consul General that the totality of Netanyahu's presentation amounted to "nothing significant." PLO Secretary-General Yasser Abed Rabbo called it "a big zero" and not a serious step forward.

19. (C) Erekat called the Consul General on the morning of June 15 to relay concerns from President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) regarding the White House statement issued after the speech. Erekat said that "the statement put words in his (Netanyahu's) mouth... he never said 'two state solution'." He said that Netanyahu "made sure that everything is closed in our faces: no to the Roadmap, no to the Arab Peace Initiative, no to a settlement freeze, no to a sovereign Palestinian state, no to negotiation over permanent status issues." He said that, while President Obama spoke in his Cairo speech about the future, Netanyahu "spoke of the past."

10. (C) Comment: Palestinians have repeatedly noted to us that President Obama's reference in Cairo to "the pain of dislocation" they have suffered over the past 60 years had a dramatic impact on their perception of American understanding of the conflict. They now believe Netanyahu is trying to undo that narrative and look to the US -- and especially to President Obama -- to stand firm to the principles he outlined in Cairo to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. End Comment.

